



International Support for East Timor Transition



East Timorese students demanding Xanana's release, a referendum and the Army pulled out — photo K Abplanalp

Nobel co-laureate José Ramos Horta is intent on securing financial and peacekeeping support for East Timor's transition to statehood.

Indonesia rejects an East Timor self-determination referendum, but the official statements are now couched in terms of 'resolving the problem once and for all'. In Portugal on February 18 an official communique explained that if "enhanced autonomy" is turned down then Parliament will be consulted and East Timor's status could "revert to what it was before integration, namely a non-autonomous territory under the United Nations aegis — the future of the territory will be the responsibility of the UN and the administering power."

Horta reports that Portugal is prepared to bankroll a United Nations operation if necessary and has already pledged US\$300 million to help finance the transitional authority. Britain has offered troops and

funds for peacekeeping, as have all the Nordic countries and Brazil. Horta also said that he was preparing the formation of an international commission of economic and financial experts to aid in the territory's reconstruction.

Australia now anticipates that East Timor will be independent by mid 2000 and may even re-open its Consulate. Substantial Australian aid has been foreshadowed on the basis of estimates that East Timor would need to raise US\$50 million (half its annual income) to replace the payments from Jakarta. Indonesia's Foreign Minister Alatas has signalled that the Timor Gap Treaty should be re-negotiated when East Timor is independent. Some estimates suggest that East Timor could have an annual cash flow of almost US\$90 million from oil revenues.*

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Bishop Belo to visit NZ



When Carlos Belo was appointed Bishop of Dili, East Timor, he was considered by many of his compatriots to be so quiet and retiring as to be the wrong choice as Bishop. His predecessor, Monsignor Lopez, a Portuguese, had been so outspoken against the Indonesians since the invasion that the Vatican had removed him from office. The appointment of Belo, a seminary teacher at the time, so incensed the clergy of East Timor that many of them refused to attend his ordination as Bishop.

History tells a different story. Carlos Belo has bravely defended the right of his people to self-determination. Despite criticism from the Vatican that he has been too outspoken in political matters, Bishop Belo has consistently asserted the need for him as Bishop to defend the fundamental rights of his people. In doing so he has won international recognition culminating in receiving the Nobel Peace prize with José Ramos Horta.

As current events unfold, his role becomes even more demanding. Some East Timorese people

have either willingly collaborated with the Indonesians or been coerced into doing so. There is fear that when the Indonesians depart, as inevitably they must, there will be retaliation against the collaborators. Another complication is that there are Indonesians who have been born in East Timor, or who have settled in the country have nowhere to go back to in Indonesia.

All these situations demand a heroic process of reconciliation. The temptation to retaliate will be high. Many hitherto oppressed countries have been paralysed by factional fighting once they have gained independence. The role of the Church in East Timor will be to encourage the people to co-operate to rebuild their devastated country. As leader of the Church, Bishop Belo will need to deploy all his skills to contribute to that goal.

In Australia, on the eve of his New Zealand visit, Belo said "Jakarta should not rush a settlement, but allow time for a peaceful transition. As a 'good neighbour', Australia should provide practical aid for the economy, education, health and agriculture."*

Fr Terry Dibble

The Violence Continues

In February Benedito de Jesus Pires was shot to death in Dili by an Indonesian soldier. At least 50,000 turned out for his funeral and to pray and sing for independence.

As we go to press, East Timor police spokesperson, Captain Widodo, announced a second registration for the recruitment of a further 250 civilians to the "Keamanan Rakyat (People's Security or Kamra)".

The 250 Kamra members already recruited are now assisting to 'maintain' security and order in six of the 13 districts in East Timor. Another two recruitment waves, each of 250 men, are expected to follow in the future.*

NZ Government failure of leadership on East Timor

In the face of a dramatic change of stance on East Timor by Indonesia and a policy u-turn by Australia, the New Zealand Government continued with a 'say as little as possible' stance.

When Indonesia announced on January 27 that it would consider the option of independence for East Timor, a pre-Christmas letter from the Australian Prime Minister was cited as a spur for the change.

Although doubts persist over the reason for the change, the Howard government became an advocate for self-determination on January 12, 1999. Foreign Minister Downer said that while his government would prefer East Timor to remain the 27th province, it was up to the people to decide their future:

"We would see [independence] as a second-best outcome but we would obviously have to live with that as the outcome," he said.

More recently, Mr Downer has discussed with the United Nations and European governments the possibility of an international force to maintain security in East Timor as it moves towards independence.

Australia's change of heart is full of internal contradictions, and official statements are still wrapped in cautious diplomatic niceties that pander to Indonesia.

The Australian government continues with its [de jure] recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor. With spectacularly bad timing — just before Xanana's release into de facto house arrest — Prime Minister John Howard rang alarm bells by calling for Australian diplomatic initiatives to persuade the East Timorese to choose autonomy because of the 'inherent instability' of a free East Timor.

Compare this with Ireland's unequivocal call for troop withdrawal, the release of Xanana Gusmão and the disarming of the paramilitaries. This also stands in stark con-

trast to New Zealand's limp statement on January 28 that "New Zealand can live with any solution the parties agree to". Mr McKinnon also "welcomed" the Indonesian Government move, and the imminent release of Xanana into de facto house arrest. There was no word of any criticism of troop levels nor any hint of a New Zealand assistance in the transition period.

In a meeting with Free East Timor Coalition activists last December Mr McKinnon raised the familiar pretext that a referendum on self-determination could lead to "civil war".

After the meeting with Australia's Prime Minister over the weekend of February 21-22, our Prime Minister stated that New Zealand will look to Australia for a lead as to the need for aid or peacekeeping forces. Considering that the New Zealand government did not hesitate to take a positive and clear stance over Bougainville leading to its playing a significant role as mediator in peacetalks, we expect more from both our Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs with respect to East Timor. (See also Xanana's letter to Matt Robson on page 12).

The Free East Timor Coalition, supported by an action alert issued by Peace Movement Aotearoa calls for our Government to act:

- to call on Indonesia to disarm the paramilitary forces, and begin troop withdrawals;
- to offer to contribute to a UN peacekeeping force with New Zealand specialist forces; and
- to open a New Zealand Consulate in Dili.

Please add your voice by writing to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rt Hon Mr D McKinnon, Parliament Buildings, Wellington, and your own MP (no stamp is required for either letter). Send the message forcefully. *

Maire Leadbeater — ETIC, Auckland

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Regional Reports from Aotearoa

East Timor Solidarity Groups

Since the inaugural Free East Timor Coalition gathering at Karioi in September 1997, the regional groupings that form this Coalition have been involved in a range of local activities, outlined below. Beyond the groups covered below, a group based at Hamilton CORSO is also active in relation to East Timor.

Otepoti/Dunedin

East Timor work in Otepoti is based at CORSO, which keeps an ongoing working partnership with the development agency East Timor Relief Association (ETRA). That has led to such things as one Dunedin solidarity worker spending time working with ETRA in Sydney, and CORSO responding to ETRA's request to reactivate the postcards campaign to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Developmental work that looks toward a post-independence future continues to be a priority for CORSO, an approach confirmed at APCET III (the third Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor) which one member attended.

The public activities run in Dunedin on key anniversaries — educational actions as well as concerts — have been characterised by song and music as a way of raising community awareness about East Timor. The East Timor Solidarity Concert run in November 1997, at which Agio Pereira of ETRA was the key performer, was a highlight. Other creative activities have included getting large numbers of people to sign a huge card to NZ Foreign Affairs Minister Don McKinnon; and handing out leaflets that focused on threats made to East Timorese who raised their flag.

Education work in schools has been another focus. Ongoing work has been carried out with 54 eleven year-olds at Cavanagh College who prepared books on their lives which were translated into Tetun and distributed by the McKillop East Timor Studies Centre in Sydney. The showing of the film "Death of a Nation" led to the PPTA passing a remit calling on its members to boycott Bali holidays.

Otautahi/Christchurch

The last year has been a busy one for the East Timor Independence Campaign Otautahi (Christchurch). November 12 1998 saw a "Pro-*Nettalk* February 1999 p 4

motion" in the City Mall, with songs, speeches and activities. Spectators were urged to complete postcards to Kofi Annan. An emphasis on networking with other groups to build local understanding of East Timor's situation led to ETICO running an educational stall at the Quaker Peace Fair, and another at a Human Rights gathering last December. Xanana's birthday was celebrated with a fundraising dinner which was fun, but didn't raise much money. ETICO also ran a letter-writing and street action campaign lobbying Government for a more active NZ stance on East Timor, directed at Mr McKinnon, which included a large protest at a public meeting to be addressed by Mr McKinnon.

ETICO's media work had some success. Interviews on student radio elicited interest and further invitations. The Christchurch Press finally published a feature article from the group. And facilitating the dramatic visit of exiled Indonesian academic George Aditjondro to the Suharto-owned Lilybank (swollen river, revolting manager), as part of his tour, enabled George to get international coverage for such hideaways of the Suharto family.

Te Whanganui a Tara /Wellington

A small group in Wellington, East Timor Action has provided a local link in the Capital for the Coalition, facilitating some of the work with Government officials and politicians. ETA assisted Virgilio da Silva Guterres of Renetil (the East Timorese students' organisation) to meet with Foreign Affairs officials and Alliance MPs, and arranged a public meeting, planning sessions with student politicians, and media coverage for his visit. Edwin Gozal, from the Indonesian democracy movement, was similarly helped to meet with officials and politicians — and to be interviewed on Breakfast TV.

ETA is also in the process of filing resources

on East Timor. ETA shares office space in the Peace and Environment Centre in Trades Hall in Vivian Street. Interested people are encouraged to use the resources.

Te Papa-i-oea/Palmerston North

While there is no formal group in Palmerston, a number of East Timorese students there are working together on educational campaigns and have recently joined the Free East Timor Coalition. In September 1998 the students carried out an education campaign with the local Catholic community.

This group has focused on the developmental needs of the future East Timorese nation after independence, in particular looking at ways academics and NGOs elsewhere can assist in educating East Timorese in certain areas, including conflict resolution.

Last December one of the group met with Mr McKinnon alongside representatives of the Coalition, and acted as a spokesperson with national and international media.

Tamaki Makau Rau /Auckland

The East Timor Independence Committee sustained a high profile for the East Timorese cause.



Sweetwaters 1999 — photo Stu Sontier

Auckland ETIC had a very successful stall at Sweetwaters. We got 200 signatories for an open letter to Don McKinnon, we also gathered 100 new members for the mailing list and handed out about 200 East Timor info pamphlets and *Nettalk*. The Eco-Politics section at the festival brought together a great range of groups and individuals working on various issues and was an opportunity for us to make links with other activists and discuss issues, methods and strategies.

ETIC kept up the momentum in the Campaign against Military links with Indonesia (see separate item on Skyhawk protests), running pickets at Defence HQ in Auckland at the time of Edwin Gozal's visit. ETIC also played a key role in the national petition to Parliament, and in the meeting with Don McKinnon. George Aditjondro's tour — which received wide coverage in national media — was coordinated from Auckland. Virgilio da Silva Guterres presented a significant paper on behalf of Xanana Gusmão at an academic conference in Auckland.

ETIC carried out extensive media work which included OpEd articles in the Herald, held a stall at Sweetwaters, and two fundraising dinners. Auckland was also responsible for the layout and mailing of the four *Nettalk* newsletters in 1998. Various demonstrations were held, including one at Aotea Square remembering the Dili Massacre; another at Garuda Airlines; and one in June to coincide with a new Indonesian officer beginning a training course.

Three Auckland Catholic church workers visited East Timor in 1998, following up developmental initiatives through the church. Other ETIC members also visited East Timor in the last year.

Whangarei

The Whangarei East Timor Independence Committee carried out a range of activities including educational stalls in the Mall in town, speaking at schools, and ensuring media coverage of local activities and international visitors. A public meeting with George Aditjondro drew some 50 people, and attracted good local interest. George was also hosted at Waiomio Marae and Waitangi on February 5-6, 1998, by Te Kawaiwhiri, and spoke on Te Tii Marae and Iwi radio on the 6th. Virgilio da Silva Guterres made an impact at his meetings with Tangata Whenua and community.

A public meeting — with a video showing and discussion with a Committee member who had visited East Timor — was also held early in 1998. In December the group's stall in the Mall focused on NZ military links with Indonesia; a petition to Don McKinnon signed there was delivered to him the same day as he was about to address Parliament on Human Rights.✻

Analysis of Indonesia's about-turn

On Wednesday January 27, Indonesia announced it was prepared to "relinquish" East Timor leader, Xanana Gusmão has been moved from Jakarta's Cipinang Prison to a form of house arrest, and he will play a more active role in the negotiations over East Timor's future.

This is a significant, even historic shift in Indonesia's previously unshakeable stand that independence for the "27th province" was not an option. The question of why Indonesia has made these changes deserves some analysis.

Indonesia is under serious economic constraints as it stumbles through the "Asian crisis". While big international financing houses like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are eager to repay Indonesia's many foreign investors for money lost in the collapse of the rupiah, money for actual development and new investment in Indonesia is extremely scarce. Investors are worried about the stability of the present regime, and governments are being pressured at home over sending or lending aid money to a corrupt, dictatorial and repressive regime.

International financiers are also demanding massive cuts to Indonesian government spending, particularly on the military, before they will sanction new investment. Indonesia badly needs to repair its damaged reputation in the international community, and East Timor is the single most damaging obstacle in the way. Simply put, the Indonesians can no longer afford their Suharto-era policies in East Timor.

But the battle for independence is far from over. The turn around, though welcomed, has been greeted with scepticism by the resistance amid worrying signs that the Indonesian leopard may be hiding rather than changing its spots. TAPOL, a London-based organization campaigning for Indonesian political prisoners, points out that the "offer" of independence and the shift of Gusmão to house arrest have a common thread: "While creating the impression that a shift has taken place, they both are based on the assumption that in fact nothing will change" said TAPOL, director Carmel Budiardjo.

The most worrying development in East Timor is the arming of pro-Indonesian civilian militia inside East Timor. Estimates of the number of automatic rifles distributed by the Indonesian army to what are in effect death squads vary up to 5,000 — considerably more than the few hundred guerrillas they are supposed to be "protecting" local villagers from. In fact, these death squads are targeting known pro-independence sympa-



Market in Dili, East Timorese are some of the most impoverished

thisers. Already, the vigilante groups have been responsible for at least 50 deaths and the evacuation of thousands of villagers from Suai, a rural area about 100km south of Dili. The victims are not simply killed, but they are often tortured and mutilated. For instance, 2 year old Fernando Cardoso was buried by a road with his head protruding from the earth. Some 6,000 people are currently camped around a church in appalling conditions seeking shelter from atrocities committed by the Indonesian-armed militia in Suai.

With this gruesome reality on the ground in East Timor, the independence option offered by Jakarta is beset with fishhooks. General Yunus Yosfiah (who commanded the military unit that killed five Australian, New Zealand and British journalists at Balibo just before the invasion proper in 1975) stated that Indonesia would ask the new MPR (Indonesian parliament) to look at "re-

on independence

mor. In a related development, the resistance
searrest that will allow him to play a greater



in South East Asia — photo K Abplanalp

“Inquishing” East Timor only if the current offer of “au-
tonomy” within Indonesia was rejected by the East
Timorese.

Although rejection seems to be a foregone conclu-
sion, with even Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas
conceding that a significant majority want to cut ties
with Indonesia, there is concern about exactly how the
East Timorese will be able to indicate their rejection of
the autonomy option. Indonesia has adamantly ruled
out a referendum, especially one which includes inde-
pendence as an option.

Speculation is rife that Indonesia has adopted a car-
rot and stick policy, with a heavy emphasis on the stick,
to ensure East Timor stays within the fold. While hold-
ing out the prospect of independence with one hand,
the other is busily fomenting civil war and economic
uncertainty. If, as expected, the East Timorese reject

autonomy, the implication is that Indonesia will sim-
ply withdraw, allowing the local economy to collapse
and plunging the population into civil war courtesy of
the armed militia.

Such a nightmare scenario may be designed to make
Indonesia’s autonomy offer more attractive to the East
Timorese, but in reality would leave no winners. The
desire of East Timor’s population for independence has
survived 23 years of the most extreme brutality. It is
hardly likely to be extinguished by the possibility of
more.

Resistance spokesperson and Nobel laureate José
Ramos Horta is upbeat about the territory’s ability to
survive the Indonesian withdrawal economically, with
the help of the United Nations and the international
community, especially Australia and New Zealand. He
has called for both countries to establish consular posts
in East Timor and for the establishment of an interna-
tional fund which could be used to buy back arms from
the militia and provide humanitarian assistance for the
population in the event of Indonesia’s sudden with-
drawal.

But he points out that unless and until Indonesia
withdraws its troops and disarms the militia, there is
no reason to take the talk of independence seriously.
“The word of an Indonesian official can as easily be
broken as it is uttered. Lies, distortion and half-truths
are part of the diplomatic game.” He points to a 1975
letter signed by then Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam
Malik just months before the invasion, promising that
Indonesia would respect East Timor’s independence,
as evidence of Jakarta’s foreign policy duplicity. There
is a growing chorus from the resistance, the East
Timorese population and solidarity movements around
the world for the immediate withdrawal of Indonesian
troops and the disarming of the militia, the uncondi-
tional release of Xanana Gusmão and the institution of
a United Nations presence in the territory. The New
Zealand government, having aided and abetted the
Suharto regime for 23 years, now has a chance to make
partial amends by adding our voice to these calls and
pledging our financial and humanitarian support for a
newly independent East Timor.

There is a real prospect of independence for East
Timor in the near future. It is now up to those of us
who have worked so long for this outcome to ensure
that the pressure remains on Jakarta, and on our own
Government, to turn this prospect into reality.*

Joe Davies, East Timor Independence Campaign,
Otautahi

The Future of East Timor — National Liberation

The following is an excerpt of the New Years speech given by Xanana Gusmão, full copy of the text is available from ETA, Wellington. A small donation to cover costs of postage and copying would be appreciated.

Our struggle for national liberation gave us more than enough time to study the history of Liberation movements around the world. Many independent countries have yet to prove their understanding of the meaning of the 'right to manage the country's fate'; their leaders are now facing serious social and political problems and regrettable economic hardships.

Indonesia itself mirrors this third world policy. Poverty and misery hide behind the beautiful buildings of metropolitan Jakarta. Fifty years after independence, social conflicts are almost intractable, external debt has reached 4 million rupiahs per capita and over 90 million Indonesians are living below the poverty line. Above all, we must avoid the independence euphoria which always emerges in the wake of a war of liberation. If it is not one party claiming to have led the whole struggle, it is individuals who paint themselves as heroes, claiming that because they have worked

the most and suffered the longest they deserve to be rewarded.

Today, feelings that separate, divide and lead to conflict between us still exist in East Timorese society, although at the National Conference, held in March 1981 we identified National Unity as a prime objective of our struggle; in 1986 we set up the Nationalist Convergence; in 1987, CNRM followed as a means of opening the way for new prospects of National Reconciliation, and CNRT's establishment represented a refinement of this process of uniting the East Timorese. The history of the third world is repeating itself: the leader of the resistance will end up as President, even if he is not up to the task; guerrilla commanders will be generals, and politicians will strive to become ministers! If this were to happen, it would be an outrage to the whole meaning of our struggle, the whole meaning of the sacrifices made by our people. It would be a betrayal!*

Indonesia reneges on UN "vote"

Talks between the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal on February 6-7 were supposed to focus on the detail of Indonesia's proposal for East Timorese "autonomy".

Before the final media conference, word broke that Indonesia had agreed 'in principle' to a UN-organized ballot. Portugal's Foreign Minister, Jaime Gama was delighted, saying that a UN organised vote would be 'face saving' for everyone. Since the Indonesians announced that independence would be offered East Timor in the event that the autonomy proposal was rejected, the question of how the East Timorese would be allowed to express their acceptance or rejection of autonomy had seemed to be the last stumbling block in the road to independence. That Sunday's an-

nouncement seemed to remove this last obstacle.

Gama commented that since the January 27 Indonesian u-turn his counterpart Ali Alatas sounded almost like a Portuguese diplomat when he talked about East Timor.

"I felt like saying to him 'Hello, Mr Gama'," said Gama.

However within hours the agreement for a UN vote was retracted very firmly by Jakarta.

To add to the confusion, President Habibie on February 12 expressed his hope that Indonesia will no longer be "burdened" with East Timor at the dawn of the new millennium.

Indonesia's smoke screens and conjuring tricks continue. Indonesia says it will decide what to do when it has heard from the people — but it will not allow a referendum to gauge their views.*

Indonesia arms Paramilitary Groups

Australian East Timorese activist, Andrew McNaughtan, visited East Timor in February 1999, Extracts from an interview given to *Green Left Weekly*:

The people are definitely aware that major changes are occurring in the diplomatic arena. But many are confused and feel threatened because of the activity of the pro-integration paramilitary thugs armed by the Indonesian military.

Some of these paramilitaries are from other provinces in eastern Indonesia. Some might be transmigrants now living in East Timor. But some are Timorese — probably a majority.

I believe that many of those who have joined these militias are doing it for the money. They are being paid 250,000 rupiahs a month, about A\$50, which is a lot of money if you are unemployed in Indonesia.

I saw refugees in Suai and Dili. There are other areas where there are refugees, like Liquisa on the north coast. When I was in Suai, there were at least 3000 refugees around the church compound in the centre of town. People were living in sheds, tents and a partly built cathedral. There had been more refugees — up to about 6000 after the wave of paramilitary terror — but some had returned to their villages.

Now the majority have gone back to their villages, reluctantly because the danger of being killed still exists, but the circumstances in which they were living were not good, with poor sanitation and few facilities.

There has been a clear pattern of attacks, starting with the Alas killings [in November] then spreading north to Turisca, and then west and north-west to Maliana, Atabae and across to Maubara and Balibo. The attacks then spread through Viqueque on to Ainaro and the south-west in the Covalima and Zumalai subdistricts near Suai. It has been a coordinated and orchestrated campaign to create terror and instability.

When I left East Timor, travelling at night, we passed through roadblocks controlled by groups of men with spears and crossbows. We were told



photo K Abplanalp

these groups were called mahidin and were paid by the Indonesian military.

A source who is very reliable told me that the Indonesian government has invested 26 billion rupiahs (more than A\$5 million) in arming the paramilitaries and fomenting "civil war" in East Timor. The funds are also being used to bribe or encourage people to support integration. In an economically depressed Indonesia and a poor East Timor, this is a huge amount of money.

I was able to meet with people connected to the resistance and also go to the National Council of Timorese Resistance office in Dili to meet with activists, including David Ximenes, one of the significant resistance leaders. I also met with students from the Student Solidarity Council, who now have a base in a number of houses in Dili.

An Australian who had been there before me told me that when the Indonesian government started talking about independence there were parties all through the night. When I was there, there was growing optimism, with a tinge of apprehension, about what the Indonesian government and military were up to. I sensed that people could see the light at the end of the tunnel, but also that there are turbulent times ahead.✱

Portugal and Indonesia open interest sections in each others capital

Ana Gomes has had a busy time since her January 30 arrival in Jakarta. As the head of Portugal's new "interest section", based in the Dutch Embassy, she has met with Foreign Minister Alatas and discussed peacekeeping with Xanana. She spoke out strongly against the arming of the pro-integrationist militia.

Indonesia will have an "interest section" in the Thai Embassy in Lisbon.

The establishment of "interest sections" in embassies of friendly countries is regarded as the first step toward establishing normal diplomatic ties. Indonesia and Portugal have had no diplomatic ties since Indonesia invaded East Timor.

Gusmão and Horta tender the olive branch

The Indonesian Justice Minister presented Xanana with a souvenir tie when he was released into house arrest on February 10. Muladi said that the resistance leader must 'work hard by taking part in the solution of the East Timor problem'.

Falantil forces are observing a cease-fire at Xanana's request and he has urged Indonesia to clarify its intentions — "so we may trace together the paths that lead [to a solution]."

"Portugal must also assume responsibility and Indonesia may participate mainly by abstaining from fueling factors of war ... there is room for East Timorese in favour of integration with Indonesia. There will be room for everyone to rebuild East Timor."

Horta has said that to forgive and tolerate former collaborators with the Jakarta regime would be the greatest act of bravery the resistance could show. ●

Australian Labor Party's major policy shift

On February 4, Laurie Brereton, Labor's Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs made a milestone speech to the Australian Institute of Foreign Affairs.

He gave a detailed and unsparing critique of his own party's past collaboration with the Indo-

nesian regime. He said the party paid a high price and earned widespread condemnation for pursuing engagement with Indonesia without concern for altruistic and human rights principles.

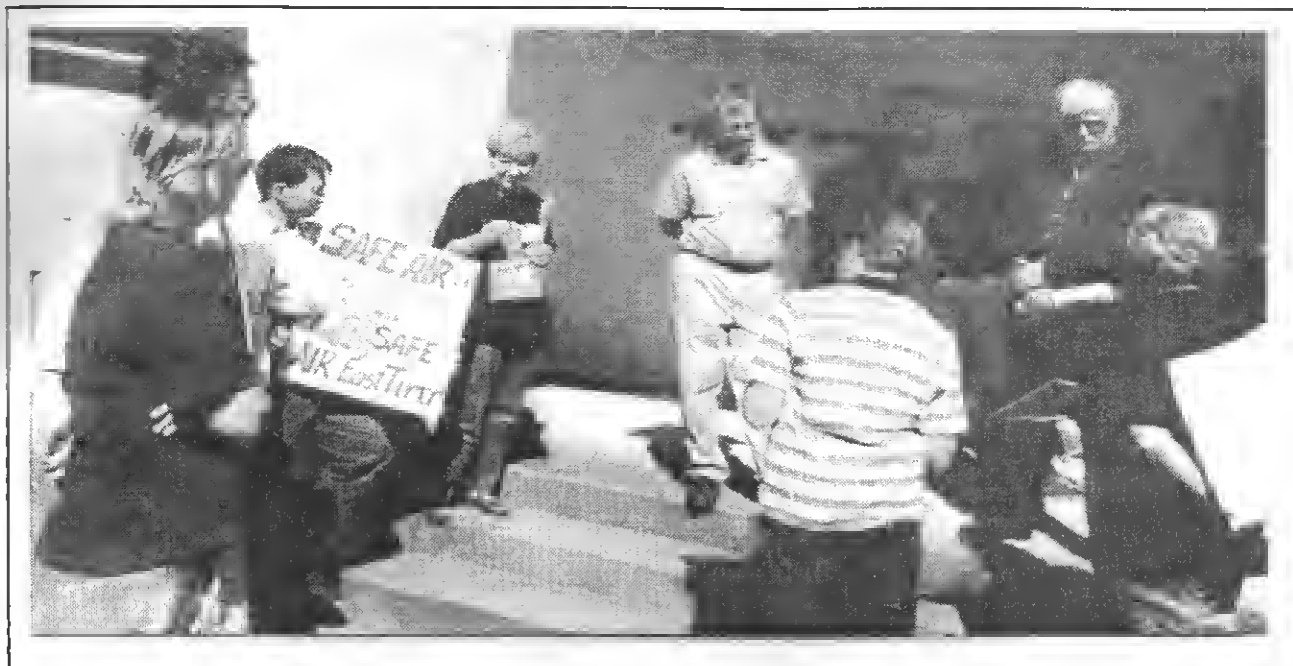
Brereton went on to detail the recent changes in Australian Labor policies which include support for the principle of self-determination. He also described initiatives that Labor has been taking since September 1998, such as calling for the appointment of an Australian Special Envoy to East Timor and calls for an Australian Consul in Dili. Mr Brereton also called for the Australian government to review the operation of the Timor Gap Treaty, and to open discussions with East Timorese leaders to ensure that in future the East Timorese will benefit from their share of the oil and gas reserves.

The speech concluded with a passionate plea for an international humanitarian and development assistance mission to go to East Timor. ●

Bishop Belo

Bishop Belo has called for an immediate United Nations presence if the East Timorese are to be consulted on self-determination. On February 8 he said two or three UN observers were urgently needed to earn the people's confidence — "otherwise there will be no conditions to go ahead with the consultation."

Protest — Export of Skyhawks



Activists marked the 7th anniversary of the Dili massacre over the weekend November 14-16 by delivering protest letters to the offices of Safe Air in Blenheim, and parent company Air New Zealand in Auckland. Safe Air is refurbishing two old Indonesian Air Force Skyhawk fighter trainers for around eight million dollars each.

Safe Air Manager Des Ashton and several of his staff came along to meet us at their Blenheim base. The debate was equable but Mr Ashton seemed impervious to our arguments, saying that he would not deal with any project which did not

"sit comfortably with him." Air New Zealand Manager, Alastair Carthew said nothing could be wrong since the contracts had satisfied all the appropriate government and regulatory processes.

Skyhawks were used to bomb East Timor's mountain villages in the 70s and 80s. The Safe Air export deal compromises New Zealand's potential to be part of the solution for East Timor. It deals us once again into complicity with Indonesia's repressive military. The timing could hardly be worse given the high hopes that independence is finally on the horizon.*

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NZ should seize the opportunity

Matt Robson, Alliance MP, attended a recent conference in Jakarta on independence for East Timor. The focus was on achieving independence with minimum disruption, and on forging solidarity between the peoples of East Timor and Indonesia.

Organised by East Timorese, this gathering was attended by ambassadors and by representatives of the two main Indonesian opposition parties: Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI and Amien Rais' PAN.

The PAN position is that no Indonesian parliament has the right to determine the future of East Timor. That was for the East Timorese as a sovereign people to decide. There should be withdrawal of Indonesian forces and an agreed process for independence under United Nations supervision.

Megawati Sukarnoputri is more equivocal. While not ruling out independence, her stated position is that East Timor is an integral part of Indonesia. But she agrees that Habibie has no authority to make a decision which should be up to the new parliament. She claimed greater knowledge on the ground than foreigners and even Ramos Horta and Xanana Gusmão. But whatever the outcome, she did stress the need for a clam and peaceful transition.

Last September Robson had met Gusmão at Cipinang, and discussed how New Zealand could actively support the process for independence by offering to be part of a peacekeeping contingent

and helping to rebuild East Timor. Our government gave its familiar equivocal response to such suggestions.

In a very recent letter to Robson, Gusmão states: *"it is imperative that the ceasefire, the withdrawal of ABRI and the process of disarmament be carried out under UN supervision. A peace keeping contingent should be deployed to oversee the process of disarmament. It would simultaneously assume the role of forming and training an unarmed Timorese police force whose members would be stationed throughout the territory to ensure political stability and public security. With the experience gained in Bougainville and other places, we believe that New Zealand is well placed to take the lead in contributing to a humanitarian and peace-brokering mission in East Timor. We firmly believe that New Zealand could be the first country to take on this noble mission of peace, assuming also responsibility for contributing financially to the sublime objective of avoiding further loss of life in an already long war which the Timorese people never wanted"*.

These proposals have been put to our government. At the time of writing, there are indications that New Zealand may announce, in conjunction with Australia, its willingness to commit to a UN peacekeeping force. New Zealand now has the opportunity to eradicate the shame of collaboration in oppression by successive governments.✻

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